Devolution and Decentralisation in Wales and Brittany: a framework for evaluation

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Our aim in this article is to deepen our understanding of processes of comparative regional governance by investigating two historic regions (Wales and Brittany) in two neighbouring European Union states. [1] This binary comparison does not pretend to exhaust the possibilities of other structured comparisons. The empirical focus is (only) on two regions; generalisation from two cases is hazardous. But there are compensatory advantages with the binary method. It allows a virtuous mix of qualitative[2], quantitative[3] and comparative analysis that is unavailable to a larger set of cases and it favours the operationalisation of empirical research strategies that combine distinctive methodologies.

Why compare Wales and Brittany? For policy-makers, comparison is bound up with practical politics. This process is important, since the National Assembly for Wales is currently working out its diplomatic priorities. The most obvious comparators are

[1] This articles draws upon the project on 'Devolution and Decentralisation in Wales and Brittany', financed by the UK Economic and Social Research Council. (Grant number L 219 25 2007). The author thanks the council for its support.

[2] We carried out 99 interviews in Wales and 101 interviews in Brittany from April 2001 to April 2003. These interviews were taped and transcribed. They lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. We thank all our interviewees for their co-operation in the two countries.

[3] Market Research Wales and Efficience 3 simultaneously carried a comparative public opinion survey in Wales and Brittany in June and July 2001. A representative sample of around 1000 (1008 in Wales, 1007 in Brittany), selected by quotas of age, gender, socio-economic group and locality, was interviewed in each region.

those within the UK itself, as the Welsh look with some envy on the Scottish Parliament with its primary legislative and tax-raising powers. Outside of the UK, Welsh policy-makers turn to regions such as Catalonia, or to nation-states such as Ireland or Denmark as models. These comparisons are sometimes quite unrealistic. Unlike Ireland or Denmark, Wales is not an EU member-state. Such comparisons are broadly aspirational; they present an ideal vision of what Wales might become. Our interest is rather different. We are interested primarily in understanding comparative regional dynamics as played out in observable interactions in specific territories. In order to avoid the over-theorisation typical of much of the literature, the article takes the form of a detailed *evaluation* of processes of regional governance in Wales and Brittany, as uncovered in extensive fieldwork in the two regions from 2001 to 2003. The article also draws some general conclusions from our Wales-Brittany comparison, arguing in favour of developing a framework of analysis that allows a more realistic appreciation of the potential for regional governance than a limited description of rule-making capacity.

The comparative framework we develop is derived from recent academic debates over 'governance' (Kooiman, 2003; Le Galès, 2002; Cole and John, 2001; John, 2001; Pierre, 2000; Rhodes, 1997). We understand governance as a useful descriptor for the new and varied governing *contexts* within which contemporary governors must operate as well as the *processes* through which political capacity is developed to address new policy challenges. Insofar as we are concerned with the meso-level, our interest in this article is primarily (though not exclusively) with regional governance. We understand region as a meso-level of (actual or potential) public administration and site for political exchange. We understand regional governance as an interactive

process encompassing institutions and actors, socially constructed identities, political opportunity structures and environmental constraints and opportunities. [4] Rather than limit our analysis to a single dependent variable, we prefer mostly an inductive approach emphasising diversity and complexity. The various dimensions we identify might each be interpreted in a more deductive manner by using particular theories of the policy process, but such is not our intention in this article.

Through adopting a mix of most similar and most different comparative methodologies (Peters, 1998, van Deth, 1998, Sartori, 1991) we set out to compare two similar regions faced with a range of comparable policy problems, but operating within two rather distinctive state settings. We argue that the mix of similarity and difference makes the Wales-Brittany pair excellent for comparative analysis, in terms of their physical location, their population size, their economic activity, their linguistic specificity, and – not least – their common historical ties. Both are regions of around three million inhabitants located on the Atlantic periphery of Europe. Both regions have their own political institutions, though regional political institution building is more advanced in Wales than in Brittany. Both regions occupy similar positions – as regions with a distinctive identity - within their respective nation-states.

[4] Notwithstanding the interesting debate over the new institutionalisms (Peters, 1999), we define institutions in an 'old' sense as comprising organisations with varying degrees of rule-making capacity. By actors we refer to individuals (operating within organisations) engaged in strategic or routine relationships. Political identity can be understood as common purpose, something that persists through time. It consists of a combination of myths, symbols, rituals and ideology. We use the term political opportunity structure especially to identify the structural incentives for party competition. By environment, we refer to the varied exogenous forces that influence the operation of regional governance systems, first and foremost modes of central government regulation.

There are important differences between the two regions, both in terms of their inherent characteristics and in their overarching state environments. While in France the regional layer covers the entire national territory, the pattern is more asymmetrical within the UK, where three of the four historic nations (Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) have their own political institutions and/or administrative machinery that sets them apart from England. On the other hand, if the regions in France are more consistently present throughout the national territory, their powers are weaker than those of the devolved territories in the UK, including those of the National Assembly for Wales. In this respect, we started from a position of qualitative difference between France and Britain. This asymmetry was deliberate and there are advantages in undertaking an asymmetrical comparison. We will argue that devolution and decentralisation present two alternative models of building regional capacity. Comparing these two models allows us better to appreciate the advantages and drawbacks of these distinctive institutional forms, neither of which can be genuinely assimilated to a federal distribution of powers.

Comparing Wales and Brittany (1) : Institutional capacity

The ability to shape public policies is a fundamental feature of regional governance.
In our comparison between Wales and Brittany, institutional variables assume great importance. Regional institutions, predicated upon precise legal rules, can provide avenues through which to develop more autonomous regional capacity. At the purely regional level, we conclude that, in most respects, the regional institutions provide more opportunities for the pursuit of territorially specific policies in Wales than in

Brittany. The institutions of devolution are weightier than those of decentralisation, whether measured in terms of budgets, personnel or legal powers.

Within the UK context, several features set the Wales example apart from those in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England. Wales had a distinctive history of administrative devolution from 1964 to 1999 (Cole, Jones and Storer, 2003). The model of executive devolution implemented in the Government of Wales Act of 1998 was heavily imbued with the legacy of the old Welsh Office, from the precise functions transferred to the key civil service personnel involved in assuring the transition. Devolution in Wales (and to a lesser extent in Scotland) presupposes a dual polity. There is an implicit division of labour between the devolved and central governments. The core functions of the state remain with central government. These are defence, taxation, social security, immigration and nationality laws. The Government of Wales Act transfers seventeen 'fields' [5], but there is no precise, constitutionally based division as in a genuine federal system. Consistent with the doctrine of parliamentary sovereignty, and the principle of secondary legislative powers, Westminster (theoretically) retains legislative pre-eminence even in transferred areas. Conforming to the traditional local government model, moreover, the Assembly can only act where it has precise statutory responsibilities. It can not invest itself with new responsibilities, nor can it raise additional sources of finance. The budgetary autonomy of the Assembly is heavily circumscribed and the Barnett formula ensures that Wales is treated on a needs-based formula designed for local

[5] These are: agriculture, ancient monuments and historic buildings, culture, economic development, education and training, the environment, health and health services, highways, housing, industry, local

government in England (Heald and McLeod, 2002)[6]. Without tax-varying powers, the Assembly depends entirely upon negotiations with the Treasury for its block grant. Negotiations on Welsh finances are undertaken by the Secretary of State and not by the Assembly itself (which must be consulted). This produces much ambiguity, as there is no guarantee that the Secretary of State will always be from the same political majority as the Assembly government.

That the Assembly makes a difference is not in doubt, however, in spite of its lack of tax-varying or primary legislative powers (Chaney, Hall and Pithouse, 2001, Jones and Osmond, 2002). The National Assembly can make primary legislation within secondary legislation (through statutory instruments and circulars), which vests it with a distinct policy formulation role (Cole and Storer, 2002). The Assembly's impact can be demonstrated in the spheres of education and health, the two major items of devolved expenditure. In the field of education and lifelong learning, the Assembly has rejected premier Blair's specialist schools, retained the comprehensive system, ended testing for 7 and 11 year olds and created a new agency (Education and Learning in Wales - ELWa) to manage all post-16 learning outside of higher education. The Assembly has also rejected all private finance initiatives in education. In the area of health, the Assembly has reformed the structures of healthcare (the creation of 22 local NHS offices) and enacted a number of symbolic egalitarian measures (such as free eye tests for pensioners). In the case of health, some policy areas remained with central government – such as the regulation of the medical

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government, social services, sport and leisure, tourism, town and country planning, transport and roads and the Welsh language.

[6] On Barnett…

profession, or abortion – but everything else (90% of all health areas) has been devolved. In this case, the relationship is mainly about benchmarking. The case of education is rather more complex. An issue such as teachers' pay is not devolved and in practice the Assembly is required to follow the standard set in London. In both health and education the ultimate limits of the Assembly's powers are legislative (the requirement to operate on the basis of precise statutes) and financial (the fixed total of the block grant).

How does this compare with the situation in France ? French administrative regions were initially established in the 1950s as technocratic outposts of the French State, with a strategic brief in economic development, transport and territorial planning. The regions were established as fully operational, democratically elected authorities in 1986. The regional institution was established while retaining the longer established and, in many ways, more powerful départements, while large cities and towns have also become powerful levels of subnational government. As a general rule, matters of immediate proximity (low-level social assistance, administrative port of first call, planning permission, waste) are the preserve of the 36,500 communes and the various inter-communal bodies to which they delegate authority. Matters of intermediate proximity are the policy province of the 96 elected departmental councils (the départements) which manage large budgets and are major service delivery agencies (in social assistance, some intermediate education, social services, roads, minimal income [RMI]). Matters deemed to be strategic are, in theory, the preserve of the elected regions: economic development, vocational training, infrastructure, some secondary education, some transport (and regional rail services since 2002), with additional responsibilities in culture and the environment.

The regional councils have modest budgets: typically they are more than that of the leading city council within the region, but less than the départements whose geographical remit is much narrower. French regions have from the outset been beset by problems of a political nature. The proportional electoral system has prevented the emergence of clear majorities in many regions, which has paralysed effective political action[7]. The regions have neither the organisational heritage, nor the political or bureaucratic resources available to the departmental councils.

In some respects, local and regional authorities in France are able to adopt territorially specific public policies in a less problematical way than in Wales. Elected French Regions have limited tax-varying powers that are not available to the National Assembly for Wales. In the French case, all sub-national authorities, including the regions, are recognised with a general administrative responsibility in law: they can do what they want, unless explicitly forbidden by the law. In Wales, not only the National Assembly, but also local government can only act where precise statutory competence exists.

[7] Direct election is a slight misnomer. Up to and including 1998, elections for the French regional councils took place on the basis of departmental party lists. The proportional representation system used – a 5% threshold and the 'highest average' methods of allocating votes to seats – marginally favoured the larger parties. In 2004, the regional electoral system was changed: to one with two rounds, a 10% threshold to representation, and a requirement that only lists obtaining at least 5% of the first round could fuse on the second. The electoral system is a hybrid one; as regional councillors are elected on departmental lists, they are representatives first and foremost of their departments, rather than their regions.

There is no real equivalent in Brittany, however, of the National Assembly for Wales's capacity to adapt primary Westminster legislation. There are some examples in the overseas French territories, in New Caledonia and French Polynesia especially, but not yet in mainland France. The 2002 law gives the Corsican Assembly some powers to make regulations, though the Constitutional Council ruled as unconstitutional Article 1, which would have vested legislative powers in the Corsican Assembly. It is premature to affirm that the direction of change in France is the same as in the UK, but important movement is afoot. In 2003, an amendment to the Constitution granted constitutional recognition to French regions for the first time, alongside communes and départements, as well as allowing for the experimental transfer of new powers from central government to sub-national authorities. Brittany is in the forefront of French regions in demanding enhanced devolutionary powers. In its Manifesto for Decentralisation, made public in September 2002, the Brittany regional council appealed for the power to adapt regulations (pouvoir normatif régional) and requested that all regional councillors be consulted by the French National Assembly before any laws concerning them be passed. There remain many divergences between the French model and those of France's principal neighbours. There are no provisions to provide legislative powers for regions, unlike in Germany, Spain or Italy. On the other hand French governments are slowing moving towards the obvious truth: that a modern complex democracy can not be administered in exactly the same way across all of its territory. Solutions need to be locally adapted.

Comparing Wales and Brittany has the advantage of focussing upon 'historic regions', with specific territorial identities. These regions are exceptional within France and the UK. In the UK, regional institutions are limited (for the moment) to the Celtic

nations. In France most regional councils do not correspond to specific historical regions, but were designed to avoid them. Modern France has been erected upon denying the legitimacy of regional (but not localist) identities and there is some way to go before any French government will admit 'ethnic' criteria as a basis for territorial organisation. In most regions in France and the UK there is no comparable stock of historical myths upon which to found regional institutions to those available in Wales and Brittany. The most effective French regions are those that have developed a powerful institutional existence without a pre-existing territorial identity, either as a result of determined political leadership (Nord/Pas-de-Calais) or economic power (Rhône-Alpes, Ile-de-France). In other areas, regions have been much less effective. The limit to any bottom-up institutionalist analysis is that regional institutions operate in different ways throughout the country. The same conclusion is valid in relation to England within the UK.

On the basis of institutional criteria, regional governance is clearly more advanced in Wales than in Brittany, in spite of the newness of regional institutions. Our framework suggests that other variables are also important for appreciating regional governance, most especially those relating to relationships, socially constructed identities, patterns of partisan behaviour and environmental constraints and opportunities.

Comparing Wales and Brittany (2): Actors and relationships

Understanding relationships and coalitions is vital in comprehending sub-national politics and administration. We posit a direct linkage between modes of regional

governance and the internal quality of relationships. In normative terms, effective regional governance is predicated upon good relationships and shared values, as well as upon powerful institutions. We can conceptualise these various qualities in terms of political capacity. Political scientists understand capacity in a variety of ways (Stone, 1989, John, 2001). We use capacity building as a generic term to identify a virtuous circle of resource synergy. Capacity building most obviously comprises regional political institutions, but also involves developing trusting horizontal and vertical relationships. There is a value-added dimension, insofar as good relationships are required to make institutions function effectively and to maximise policy outputs. Capacity building is also linked with trust and interconnectivity (Brown, Green and Lauder, 2000, Randles, 2001, John, 2001).

What evidence do we find of trusting relationships, interconnectivity and shared visions and values amongst political, economic and societal decision-makers in Wales and Brittany? Schematically, Brittany builds upon territorial solidarity and a broad consensus to promote institutional interconnectivity and to enmesh institutions within civil society. In Wales, on the other hand, linkage between civil society and political institutions is still in its infancy. This weakness of 'civic culture' is in part a consequence of the absence of genuine Welsh political institutions until 1999, but it also demonstrates the frailty of underlying consensual values.

Let us develop further the comparison by focussing upon the related themes of trust and interconnectivity. Trust evokes sentiments of honesty, a culture of co-operation and a high level of social capital. In the case of Brittany, our opinion survey revealed

a high degree of trust in the regional council[8], a belief that the region defends Brittany's interest well in other arenas[9] and a preference for the region over other arenas in many important areas of public policy[10]. These findings are consistent with mainstream representations of Breton political culture, which emphasise political moderation, the cohesive traditions of the co-operative movement in farming and banking, the robust state of participation in voluntary associations, consensual Breton political traditions and a developed sense of regional identity (Le Coadic, 1998; Le Bourdennec, 1996; Favereau, 1993). In Wales, there is less trust in the devolved institutions and a more distinctive set of political cleavages, a theme we develop in the next section.

Trust has an iterative dimension that is linked to interconnectivity. In other words, relationships need to be built upon repeated contacts. The small scale of policy-making in both Wales and Brittany facilitates frequent relationships. This proximity

[8] An overwhelmingly majority of our Breton poll – 82.1% - expressed their 'trust' in the Brittany regional council to assure the development of Brittany.

[9] Almost three-quarters of our survey – 74.2% - believed that the existence of the Regional Council was important for defending Brittany's influence in Paris.

[10] Public opinion in Brittany (and Wales) strongly believes that the regional authorities *ought* to make the main decisions in the two fields of training and regional languages. In Brittany, the region comes out ahead of other levels – national, local or European. In the case of the Breton language, the Regional council is identified as the appropriate level by a majority of respondents (53 per cent), ahead even of the National Assembly for Wales in the Welsh case (50 per cent). In the case of education and training 43,5 per cent favoured the Regional Council as the appropriate level of policy-making, followed by 24.5 per cent for local government, 20.5 per cent for central government and only 3.1 per cent for the European Union. In the case of Wales the figures were the Assembly (41.5 per cent) the UK government (25.3 per cent), local government (23.4 per cent) and the European Union (3.1 per cent).

is increasingly obvious in the case of post-devolution Wales. In the opinion of one interlocutor: 'We've got better structures in Wales than in England. We've got Team Wales, we're small and we work closely together'. All the main players know each other personally and there are close linkages not only between civil servants and ministers, but also between politicians, officials and representatives of Welsh civil society. Devolution has created several new all-Wales organisations, such as Careers Wales and Education and Learning Wales (ELWa), and reformed old ones such as the Welsh Development Agency (WDA). The Assembly has also transformed the myriad of agencies (QUANGOs) inherited from pre-devolution days into Assembly-sponsored public bodies (ASPBs) and introduced mechanisms to make them more accountable. In spite of these innovations, several interviewees lamented the absence of a genuine all-Wales civil society. The Assembly has created a series of semi-formal networks (the three 'Partnership Councils' for business, the voluntary sector and local government) to associate public, private and voluntary sectors with policy formulation. Insiders criticised the superficial character of this neo-corporatist ambition. Business resented the Assembly's demands on its time and perceived its influence over policy to be limited. Local government suspected the Assembly of aggrandizement at its expense. Only the voluntary sector was enthusiastic.

There is some evidence that the first term of devolution has provided the mobilising project necessary to embed the Welsh polity and to build Welsh civil society, in the long run potentially overcoming an important social capital deficit. There is a more cohesive party system, the equilibrium of which is favourable to making the devolved institutions work. There is the 'team Wales' approach, signifying the building of new institutions as part of the devolved family and the diffusion of emerging referential

frames. There are much closer contacts between Welsh Assembly government officials and Assembly sponsored public bodies than in the pre-devolution era (Cole, Jones and Storer, 2003). There is the appearance, finally, of all-Wales organisations within civil society and the gradual recognition by professional organisations (the CBI and TUC notably) of the need to take devolution into account in their own organisation.

In Brittany, observers have long noted a deeply rooted territorial solidarity. Though modern Brittany harbours the divisive political memory of wartime 'collaboration'[11], the dominant political culture is one of political accommodation. In a rather paradoxical manner, Breton political capacity is strong because of the weak intensity of domestic cleavages, confirmed below in our opinion poll findings. While not going as far as to suggest a cross-partisan consensus on the broad issues facing Brittany, there is an underlying consensus to defend Breton interests to the outside world and limit political conflict. This consensual model is broadly shared within Breton public opinion. Above all, the idea of region has a strong moral authority in the case of Brittany, the birthplace of regional consciousness and identity in France (Cole and Loughlin, 2003, Dargent, 2001). In practice, French sub-national governance, in Brittany as elsewhere, is characterised by resource-based competition between overlapping layers of sub-national administration: communes, inter-communal bodies, départements and regions. The Brittany region stands out, however, for its high level of cross-communal co-operation, not only in urban centres such as Rennes, but in the

[11] During the wartime occupation, around one hundred Bretons formed a brigade in the German army in return for promises of an autonomous Brittany. This explicitly anti-French and collaborationist gesture continues to harm the Breton regionalist movement until the present day.

rural hinterland as well. Brittany scores highly in terms of institutional inter-connectivity, embodied by traditions of inter-communal co-operation, normally harmonious relationships between regional politicians and representatives of the state field services, and high levels of social capital, measured by an active associative life, high electoral participation and strong social networks acting as a barrier to the extreme right (weaker in Brittany than anywhere else in France).

The linkage between governing capacity, shared values and the quality of inter-organisational and inter-personal relationships is central to the debate over regional governance. The horizontal enmeshing of regional political institutions with public, private and voluntary sector bodies is one gauge of interconnectivity. If institutions are primordial in the Welsh case, we can surmise that relationships are more important in the case of Brittany. Relationships based on trust and regional advocacy exist both at the horizontal (within Brittany) and vertical levels. At the horizontal level, our interlocutors in Brittany were virtually unanimous in praising the capacity of Breton actors to join forces to promote their common interests and to defend Brittany against attacks from the outside world. There was no such unanimity in Wales, in spite of the Assembly's espousal of all-inclusive politics. These qualities are not necessarily innate to Brittany and absent in Wales. We observed above that actors believed in the beginnings of a 'Wales effect' and the emergence of a more unified Welsh political culture post-devolution. The temporal dimension is important : devolution in Wales is only four years old, undoubtedly too short period of time to draw firm conclusions about the capacity for institutional or policy learning.

We can surmise from the above that regional governance is most effective when regional institutions are well interconnected with lower and higher level political and administrative echelons, as well as being deeply embedded within civil society. It also appears axiomatic that effective regional governance must rest upon a strong sense of regional awareness and a linkage between identity and institutions, a theme which we now address.

Comparing Wales and Brittany (3) Identity and Instrumentalism

As Keating (1998) reminds us, regions are socially constructed entities. How best, then, can we comprehend socially constructed identities and attitudes towards regional political institutions in Wales and Brittany? How are these relationships articulated in party political terms? Does the political opportunity structure facilitate or frustrate the linkage of regional identities and institutions? These questions were central to the comparative opinion survey we carried out in Wales and Brittany in June and July 2001.

Identity and institutional choice The linkage between identity and institutions was a core concern of the survey. A representative sample of 1008 in Wales (1007 in Brittany), selected by quotas of age, gender, socio-economic group and locality, was interviewed in each region. We rejected from the outset the argument of non-comparability because of fundamental differences in identity and institutional preferences. In both regions public opinion was divided, but there was simultaneously a strong sense of regional identity and a widespread demand for powerful regional institutions.

Table One
Institutional Preferences in Wales and Brittany

Q. There is a debate today in France/Wales on the future of decentralisation/Devolution. Which one of the following options do you prefer ?	**Brittany** (n.1007)	**Wales** (n.1008)
'Abolish the Regional Council / National Assembly for Wales'	1.9% (n.21)	23.6% (n.237)
'Retain a Regional Council / National Assembly with limited powers'	43.8% (n.441)	23.6% (n.238)
'Create an elected parliament with tax-varying and legislative powers'	34% (n.343)	37.7% (n.380)
An independent Brittany / Wales	12% (n.121)	11.1% (n.112)
Don't know	8.3% (n.84)	4% (n.41)

Table Two
The Moreno Identity Scale for Brittany and Wales

Brittany	n.1007	**Wales**	n.1008
Breton, not French	2.1% (n.21)	Welsh, not British	20% (n.202)
More Breton than French	14.5% (n.146)	More Welsh than British	17.2% (n. 173)
Equally Breton and French	56.9% (n. 573)	Equally Welsh and British	34.7% (n.349)
More French than Breton	17.2% (n. 173)	More British than Welsh	22.2% (n.224)
French, not Breton	7.5% (n. 76)	British, not Welsh	5.8% (n.59)
Don't know	1.8% (n.18)		0.1% (n.1)

We observed a number of similarities between Wales and Brittany. There is a relationship between politicised identities and institutional choices in both regions, especially relating to support for independence[12]. There are some interesting contrasts

[12] We developed a formal model ('Identity and instrumentalism') of logistic regression to distinguish between devolution and decentralisation in Wales and Brittany. In our logistic regression analysis, we treated support for regional political institutions as our principal dependent variable. We identified a series of independent variables, selected on the basis of the existing literature and in accordance with our theoretical framework. These included the classic independent variables of age, gender, education and place of birth. We also integrated attitudinal and opinion variables such as identity, language aptitude, attitude towards devolution in Wales, the preferred level of decision for policies and voting

between Wales and Brittany, notably concerning the role of language and voting choice. In Wales, there was a clear linkage between language competency and institutional choices. Those who speak or understand Welsh well or fairly well are more inclined to support enhanced devolution[13]. In Brittany, there is a slight negative relationship between language competency and support for independence or for enhanced forms of devolution. There is a lingering sense of shame amongst native Breton speakers (concentrated in the oldest age categories) and an over-compensation of loyalty to France and the French state. With regards to voting choice, we observed a strong relationship between intended vote in a regional election and institutional preference in Wales, but no significant relationship in Brittany[14].

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behaviour. In the case of Wales, a sense of exclusive Welsh identity was the most significant variable explaining support for independence. Those feeling primarily or exclusively Breton were also unambiguously regionalist, favouring either autonomy/independence or more enhanced forms of regional governance. Those feeling exclusively (17%) or predominantly (20%) Welsh were far more prevalent than their Breton counterparts (2% exclusively Breton, 15% predominantly Breton). See Cole and Baudewyns (2003) for fuller explanation.

[13] We observed a positive correlation (.164**, Pearson correlation) between fluency in Welsh and support for regional political institutions. In the case of Brittany, the relationship was negative (-0.80*, Pearson correlation).

[14] In Wales, Plaid Cymru voters massively supported either independence (28%) or an elected Parliament (51%). Labour and Liberal Democrat voters were much less supportive of the independence option (7% and 1% respectively), though a plurality in both electorates advocated an elected Parliament with tax-varying powers (43% in each electorate). Unsurprisingly, the dominant position amongst the Conservative electorate was for a return to pre-devolution arrangements (54%) In Brittany, we observed no significant difference according to intended vote in a regional election.

Multiple identities (regional and national) are more easily assumed in Brittany than in Wales. A far higher proportion of the Welsh survey (table two) considered itself to be exclusively or primarily Welsh than was the case in Brittany. A sense of Welshness as being essentially opposed to Britishness is firmly rooted in a sizeable minority of Welsh people. We can legitimately conclude that in Wales opinion is highly polarised, a polarity that manifests itself by starkly opposed positions in relation to identity and institutional preferences. In Brittany, in contrast, the sense of regional identity is strong, but this is not considered as being in opposition to an overarching French nationhood (Cole and Loughlin, 2003). In the French region, Breton and French identities are mainly complementary. The greatest difference between Wales and Brittany therefore lies not so much in institutional preferences for the future, as in the linkage between national and regional identities and in the party political dynamics that we now consider.

Partisan choice and the political opportunity structure The essential differentiation between devolution in Wales and decentralisation in Brittany is of a (party) political order. We asked both populations how they intended to vote if a general or a regional election were to be held tomorrow. We then cross-tabulated regional voting intention with institutional preferences. In Brittany, we observed few differences according to voting intention, confirming the belief expressed in many interviews that institutional preferences cut across existing parties. Such a consensus is less obviously apparent in the case of Wales. Within the Welsh electorate, we identified three distinct positions, ranging from a residual Conservative hostility to the principle of devolution, to overwhelming support from intending Plaid Cymru voters for at least a Scottish-style parliament, with Labour and Liberal democrats occupying a median position

favourable to going beyond executive devolution. Rather like the Assembly members we interviewed, few support the existing settlement, with the status quo option arriving in third position in each electorate ('retain an elected Assembly with limited powers'). Executive devolution appears as the hollow core of regional governance in Wales.

As political parties aggregate interests, so party politicians play a crucial role in shaping political demands. The presence or not of a powerful regionalist party, the attitudes adopted by national parties to issues of territorial identity, the rewards to be gained by emphasising one or another level of governance: all of these are in part shaped by the party linkage function. We demonstrated above that there are no significant relationships between regional voting choice and attitudes to autonomy in Brittany. Why is this the case? We highlight two fundamental reasons, concerning first, the legacy of the past, and, second, the contemporary political opportunity structure. Breton-style identity politics were discredited by the collaborationist activities of a minority of Breton activists during the war. The prevailing post-war model of political activism has been one of territorial solidarity. There has been a strong political consensus among the regional elites in favour of enhanced regionalisation, but also a recognition of the need to enter into a dialogue with the French state. The counterpart to the ongoing dialogue with the central state is that national political parties operating within Brittany are infused with Breton cultural values and local or regional politicians are aware of the need to combine strong regional and national messages. The successful articulation of mixed messages helps explain why the Breton political scene has been dominated by national parties, rather than regionally specific ones. Regionalist parties have been ineffective because they

are unable to influence the centres of political and economic power in Paris. Not only have national parties adapted their message while in Brittany, but Bretons have been spectacularly successful in positioning themselves as leaders of national parties. Brittany's political elite has adapted to the French logic of territorial decentralisation, having itself had a major influence in forcing decentralisation onto the political agenda, and in obtaining disproportionate resources through playing up, within limits, its territorial distinctiveness.

There are some similarities with the situation in Wales, where Welsh politicians also reached the heights of political power by operating through the national parties, first the Liberals, latterly Labour. A sense of Britishness was inculcated into Welsh consciousness by the actions of politicians such as Aneuran Bevan, who stressed British public services, uniform national (i.e. British) standards and who sought to defend British sovereignty. The critical distinguishing marker in Wales related to the existence of a powerful Nationalist Party (Plaid Cymru) whose core electorate is the Welsh-speaking heartland of north-west and mid-Wales. The influence of Plaid Cymru can be measured by the issues placed upon the political agenda, as well as the pressure placed upon other party players to incorporate explicit territorial demands in their programmes. During the 1997 referendum campaign, the leading Labour Party was much less divided over devolution than it had been in 1979. The emergence of Rhodri Morgan as uncontested Welsh leader since 2000 has represented the coming of age of a specifically Welsh Labour party, cognisant above all of its core territorial interests. Devolution in Wales is a dynamic process. Though the existence of labour majorities in London and Cardiff has been a factor of cohesion, First Minister Morgan

campaigned in 2003 on creating ‘clear red water’ between the Labour party in Wales and London.

Our survey findings thus confirm our differentiation of processes of regional governance in Wales and Brittany. In the Welsh case, cleavages are deeply embedded and there is a real debate between independentists, devolutionists and unionists. Support for enhanced devolution (and even more so independence) is party political, with a powerful regionalist party mobilising support for more enhanced devolutionary solutions and maintaining pressure on the other parties. Voting choice clearly influences attitudes towards independence, as does competency in the Welsh language. Unlike in Wales, Breton identity is not a diacritical political marker of difference. There is a latent Breton consciousness, but this is not a political resource that can be mobilised by regionalist political parties and we observe no significant relationships between regional voting choice and attitude to autonomy. On balance, regional governance in Wales is driven more by the force of identity politics and the dynamic of polity building, whereas regional capacity in Brittany prospers because the prevalent mode of regional advocacy has proved to be very effective and because the political opportunity structure has pre-empted the development of a regionalist party (Cole and Loughlin, 2003). Identity foci, institutional demands, instrumental incentives and political opportunity structures thus all produce substantive differences between Wales and Brittany.

Comparing Wales and Brittany (4) Environmental constraints and opportunities

Understanding regional governance in Wales, Brittany or any other region requires cognisance of the overarching context within which regional institutions operate and the interplay between micro-, meso and macro-level processes. We can identify a number of 'environmental' variables that influence the form of regional governance in Wales and Brittany. We investigate here the importance of the legal-constitutional order, provisions for asymmetry and the mode of inter-governmental relations. Other themes - such as Europeanisation and influence of sub-national players in the European arena – are manifestly important, but deserve a separate treatment. We observe that both France and the UK are the EU member-states, not the devolved or decentralised authorities. If the French State is more centralised than the British one in controlling the interactions of its sub-national units with Brussels, the difference is one of degree.

The legal/constitutional order

The British and French governments have devolved powers to regional assemblies; they have not transformed themselves into federal states. The British unwritten constitution, by definition, does not embed federalism in a series of constitutionally entrenched rules. The French constitution explicitly rejects federalism in its Article 72, though it refers to subsidiarity. The British case has revealed a deep opposition to generic written rules and a preference for specific legal statutes over anything that resembles a constitutional order. In the case of France, where all 22 regions are in theory treated exactly the same, there is a greater appearance of consistency, though this is rather misleading. In both instances, legal-constitutional frameworks impose constraints and create opportunities.

Devolution in the United Kingdom has been incremental and piecemeal, driven by political and party pressures and founded upon informal relationships, ambiguous legal statutes and unwritten rules. There is a real tension within Welsh devolution between policy improvers and polity builders. For supporters of the existing arrangements, the Government of Wales Act (1998) establishes a settlement whereby the Assembly can adapt Westminster legislation, within the limits prescribed by Acts of Parliament, in the interests of providing better services for Welsh people. A convention has arisen that the Westminster parliament will not legislate on devolved matters without the consent of the Assembly, which ought to ensure that Welsh interests are safeguarded at the centre. For the overwhelmingly majority of Assembly members interviewed, however, the Government of Wales Act was a first step, leading logically to a Scottish-style devolution, a Welsh Parliament and tax-varying powers. From this perspective, the current piecemeal approach is a source of fragility. In the event of different political majorities in Cardiff and London, scenarios are difficult to predict. No part of the British constitution sets out what is to be deemed primary and what secondary legislation. At present, there are no guaranteed powers for the Assembly. Rawlings (2001) points out that a future hostile government could 'cheat the Assembly of its powers' by minimising the range of statutory instruments agreed in future laws. The future direction of Welsh devolution is uncertain, but it is being propelled towards a destination beyond that envisaged by the framers of the 1998 Act.

In France there are arguably two contradictory principles that underpin the system of intergovernmental relations. First, the 1982 decentralisation laws determined that

decision-making responsibilities should be attributed to specific 'levels' of sub-national authority, giving the illusion of a federal-style attribution of competencies. Second, the legislation set out that all authorities should be free to make policies in areas they deemed to be important for their constituents. The first of these principles enshrines the so-called 'blocs de compétences', particular responsibilities carried out by the different levels. The second principle – that of the 'free administration of local authorities' – cuts across the apparent clarity of the first, by allowing communes, departments and regions to compete openly with each other and adopt policies designed to appeal to their electorates.

The ability to steer local authorities is an important dimension of meso-level leadership. In Wales, the National Assembly has clear precedence over the other layers of sub-national administration, but this is not the case in Brittany. Since the Government of Wales Act (1998), the National Assembly has determined the criteria for the allocation of funds to local authorities. There have been important changes in the formula for funding local authorities (notably the top-slice from the capital city Cardiff in favour of poorer authorities). In France, there is no formal hierarchy between the different levels of sub-national administration and no single authority can impose its will on any other, or prevent a rival authority from adopting policies in competition with its own. Unlike in genuinely federal systems, the French regions do not exercise leadership over other local authorities; if anything, the French regions are dependent upon the co-operation of lower-level authorities – the départements in particular – for the successful implementation of their own policies.

Assymetry or uniformity?

The UK model of asymmetrical devolution has produced variable outcomes across the Kingdom: full legislative devolution in Scotland, a (suspended) devolutionary process in Northern Ireland, secondary legislative, or 'executive' devolution in Wales and a commitment to regional referendums in England. From the start, there has been an explicit distinction between the four nations forming the United Kingdom. In the French unitary context, such 'imagined communities' are less acceptable. In France, the dominant referential frames and legal/constitutional rules combine to ensure that there is less disparity in outcomes across the territory. The French constitutional model emphasises equality and uniformity. These beliefs explain the opposition of self-identified republicans to adapting institutions to different territorial realities, whether in New Caledonia, Corsica or on the French mainland. We touch here at the core of state sovereignty which, in the French case, is intimately tied in with perceptions of national prestige and territorial hierarchy.

Regionalism in Brittany must operate within this 'Jacobin' heritage. The lack of asymmetry in mainland France has limited the extent to which regions with strong identities can pursue distinctive institutional paths. Is this about to change? The 2003 constitutional reform introduced the possibility for the experimental transfer of functions to sub-national authorities. Any sub-national authority – a region, but also a <u>département</u>, an inter-communal structure or a commune – can bid to exercise a range of responsibilities that were previously in the policy domain of the central state or other public authorities such as the chambers of commerce. For traditional republican opponents of the reform, the principle of experimentation undermines the constitutional provision for equality. In practice, the spirit of uniformity remains

more pervasive than that of local or regional differentiation. Though any sub-national authority can bid to run services on an experimental basis, this decision will need to be approved by the French parliament. Moreover, after a five-year period, parliament will then have to decide whether the transfer of functions should be made permanent. If so, the new policy responsibility will be transferred to all cognate sub-national authorities throughout France, thereby ensuring equal treatment.

The 'special statute' clause of the 2003 reform provides potentially for a more radical break with the past. The constitutional reform bill proposes two separate mechanisms for creating authorities with a 'special statute': agreement between the elected representatives of two or more local authorities; through local referendums. These provisions might produce varying institutional outcomes across the territory, on condition they are approved by parliament. Various ideas have been launched, including the merging of separate regions into single authorities in Normandy, Savoie, the Rhine and Corsica. In the case of Brittany, there have been calls, from traditional regionalists and others, for the Brittany region to recover the Loire-Atlantique département and to restore Brittany in its historic boundaries. Alongside pleas for the unification of historic regions such as Brittany, Normandy, Savoie and the Rhine, there have also been arguments, notably by former President Giscard d'Estaing, now President of the European Convention, for the creation of a few large regions to be comparable with German länder.

Modes of intergovernmentalism

Inter-governmental relations in post-devolution Britain are assured by the system of Joint Ministerial Committees (JMCs), and the intergovernmental agreements known as 'concordats'. The JMC exists in summit and sectoral formats. The summit version brings together the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, the First Ministers and Deputies of the devolved governments, and the territorial Secretaries of State. The composition of the sectoral version of the JMC varies according to Whitehall department. Insiders considered that most interaction between London and Cardiff took place outside of these committees, in informal contacts at civil servant, ministerial or party levels. The one area of genuine innovation has been in relation to European policy, where the JMC operates as an informal mechanism for negotiating a UK-wide position in advance of European summits.

The second level of agreements are the written concordats, existing at inter-departmental as well as intergovernmental levels. Several interviewees were sceptical of the value of the concordats, which do not have a constraining character. The JMC and the concordats are both inter-executive devices. Members of the Welsh Assembly Government and of the UK government have insisted upon confidentiality in their dealings, a sine qua non for Welsh interests being considered in Westminster primary legislation. The Assembly qua legislature is not a party to these interactions. The mode of intergovernmental relations in post-devolution Britain is one of informality, secrecy and incremental adjustments, consistent with the aversion to written rules we observed above. Whether this empiricist approach could survive a change in political majority in London is a moot point.

In the case of France, inter-governmental relations are more formalised and codified. In the Breton case, the regional council operates alongside (and generally co-operates with) the French state, which deeply penetrates civil society in a manner that has no British equivalent. Decentralisation in France can in some respects be interpreted as a central response to governing complexity through 'steering at a distance'. The State-Region plans provide powerful evidence for this. The elected regions are tied into five-year contracts negotiated with the regional prefectures. Typically, the state puts pressure on the regions to allocate a proportion of regional finances to joint projects in areas such as road building or university construction that do not fall within their official responsibilities. On the other hand, the strengthening of state field services is compatible with analyses based on regional governance. Administrative decentralisation (the creation of the regional prefectures in 1964) has certainly created more powerful state actors at the departmental and regional levels; this has, in turn, created a more interdependent form of policy making. Stronger state partners have vested the new regional authorities with credibility in areas such as transport, education, training and economic development. In the French context, a strong, decentred state might even be a pre-condition for the emergence of strategic regional authorities capable of assuming their responsibilities.

The development of enhanced regional capacity has had an impact upon intergovernmental relations in both countries. The responses adopted to deal with increased complexity - codified and formal, in the one case, informal and irregular in the other – represent distinctive modes of intergovernmentalism that are embedded in specific politico-administrative traditions, but which pose challenges to and are gradually reshaping these traditions.

Conclusion

Devolution and decentralisation in Wales and Brittany are best understood as two alternative forms of territorial institution building. This differentiation is due in part to structural factors. The British union and French unitary states offer differing structural incentives (or disincentives) for regionalism and regional political institution building. Meso-level actors react in rational ways to the structural incentives developed at the macro level. Devolution in Wales appears focussed on territorial identity and polity building, decentralisation in Brittany on proximity as a response to policy solutions. Our survey evidence suggests that the logic of these distinctive institutional forms is understood by public opinion. In Brittany, regional political institutions and regional public policies are evaluated by public opinion on instrumental, performance grounds, whereas in Wales they are indissociable from distinctive, spatially bounded identities.

There is, thus, an essential differentiation between processes of regional governance in Wales and Brittany. Each needs to be evaluated first within its own specific terms of reference, though we can draw more general lessons as well. Wales falls on the identity side of the identity/instrumental spectrum. The real achievements of devolution in Wales are somewhat obscured not only by an obfuscated and unworkable settlement, but also by the persistence of crosscutting identities based on linguistic, geographic and socio-economic differences. If anything, the identity issue blurs the greater policy relevance of the National Assembly for Wales. There is some evidence, however, from elite interviews as well as from public opinion polls, that the first term of devolution has provided the mobilising project necessary to legitimise

the idea of a Welsh polity and to build a Welsh civil society. The institutions of devolution have the merit of existing and have gradually imposed themselves as the main sub-central arena for symbolic politics. Far more than in Brittany, the destination of devolution in Wales remains unknown, contingent mainly upon party political balance. From our empirical investigation, we deduce strong support for codifying powers in a proto-constitutional format, or, at the very least, for less opaque definitions of competencies. For devolution to become irreversible, it needs a firmer constitutional footing.

The French region appears more tied-in to an overarching system of state-centric, national regulation than its Welsh counterpart. Regional capacity in Brittany has prospered because the prevalent mode of regional advocacy has proved to be very effective. As in Wales, public opinion in Brittany has integrated the logic of distinctive institutional forms into its own understanding of regional governance. Most Bretons fall on the instrumental side of the instrumental/identity spectrum. They are conscious of the limits of regional capacity building within the context of French republicanism. Support for regionalisation in Brittany is rather more instrumental (the region as the appropriate level for good services) rather than identity-based (the region at the service of a distinct identity, separate/adversarial from that of the rest of France). Brittany arguably has more to gain than other regions from the reform process launched in 2003. It has been amongst the most ambitious French regions, but it has not substantially contested the unitary character of the French State and accepts that it will progress at the same rhythm as the other regions. Our evidence suggests a more comfortable linkage between regional identity and regional *and* national political institutions in the case of Brittany than in Wales. Even regionally minded

Bretons have difficulty in escaping from the mindset of the one and indivisible French Republic.

We set out in this article to deepen our understanding of processes of comparative regional governance. We have offered a framework for analysis that combines criteria drawn from institutions, relationships, identities, political opportunity structures and environmental constraints and opportunities. If Welsh devolution is above all shaped by the institutional avenues opened in the Government of Wales Act of 1998, regional capacity in Brittany is built upon a dense network of relationships and tested forms of horizontal and vertical linkage. Political opportunity structures are vital for understanding comparative regional dynamics, notably the political space available for the development of a regionalist party, the interlocking of regional and social movements and the structure of incentives for regional players to engage in local, regional, national or European games. In the case of Brittany, the power to influence decision-making at a regional level continues to be mediated by a system of national regulation. Breton politicians of all (national) parties have looked as a priority to exercise influence in Paris, there where power lies. In the Welsh case, the experience of devolution has been accompanied by a regionalisation of political incentives in a more explicit manner than prior to 1997.

The linkage between identity, territory and institutions is primordial for comparing regions, the Wales-Brittany comparison suggesting that politicised identities do not necessarily add value to regional political institutions. Indeed, divisive or conflictual identities are less propitious to collective social ownership than harmonious ones. Understanding regional governance, finally, requires cognisance of the overarching

environment: the importance of constitutional rules, mechanisms of financial transfer, inter-institutional linkages, the capacity of central government to intervene in devolved areas, the Europeanisation of specific policy sectors and so on. As in Wales and Brittany, we can best comprehend processes of regional governance in other regions by combining explanations based on institutions, relationships, identities, political opportunity structures and environmental constraints and opportunities. Logically, it is impossible to draw a theoretical hierarchy of explanations between these variables without reference to specific places at specific times.

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